ANNUAL REPORT
2019

SOMERSET COUNTY
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

January, 2020
Shanel Y. Robinson, Director  
Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders  
County Administration Building  
20 Grove Street  
P. O. Box 3000  
Somerville, NJ 08876

RE: 2019 Open Space Advisory Committee Annual Report

Dear Freeholder Robinson:

On behalf of the Somerset County Open Space Advisory Committee, I am pleased to submit our Annual Report for 2019. The Somerset County Open Space Preservation Program had another successful year with respect to implementing the County's duly adopted "Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan". With the addition of over 50 acres, the total park inventory now exceeds 14,750 acres.

2019 was extremely busy in terms of land acquisition and related parks, recreation and open space initiatives, most notably the update to the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan Update which is being coordinated with the update to the County's Farmland Preservation Plan and the creation of a Historic Preservation Plan. The updated plan will reinforce existing goals and introduce new ones to reflect the evolution of the Open Space Preservation Program.

The continued support of the Board of Chosen Freeholders is greatly appreciated. Without the Board's endorsement and follow through, the Open Space Preservation Program would not be as successful as it is today. We look forward to the combined efforts of the Freeholders, Somerset County Park Commission and Open Space Advisory Committee in 2020 to continue the past success of the Open Space Program.

Sincerely,

Christopher Kelly

Christopher Kelly, Chair  
Open Space Advisory Committee

Attachment  
c: Freeholders  
Park Commissioners  
OSAC Members
2019 ANNUAL REPORT
SOMERSET COUNTY OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Membership

The ten members are chosen, two each by the Democratic Party, Republican Party, Planning Board, Park Commission and Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Nine individuals were appointed and served on the Committee in 2019 for a term of one year. Officers were determined by election in accordance with adopted bylaws.

   Chris Kelly, Chair
   Helen Haines, Vice Chair
   Brian Gallagher, Freeholder
   A.D. Amar
   Randy Jones
   Gary LaSpisa
   Suzanne Ochse
   Albert Ribeiro
   Walter Rusak

Staff/Non-Voting

   Thomas Boccino, Principal Planner, County Engineering Parks Section
   Adam Bloom, Principal Engineer, County Engineering Parks Section
   Geoffrey Soriano, Director, Park Commission
   Walter Lane, Director, County Planning Board
   Katelyn Katzer, Principal Planner, County Planning Board

County Counsel

   William T. Cooper, III, Esq.

Summary of Meetings

The Open Space Advisory Committee met on eight occasions at the Somerset County Administration Building:

   January 16, 2019
   February 13, 2019
   March 13, 2019
   April 10, 2019
   May 8, 2019
   July 10, 2019
   September 11, 2019
   November 13, 2019
### 2019 Attendance

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### 2019 Land Acquisition Summary

- **Sourland Mountain Preserve**
  - Katimbang (Hillsborough)
    - B 169 L 37, 38
    - 41.95 ac.

- **South Branch Greenway**
  - Muckenhoupt (Branchburg)
    - B 89 L 3, 4, 5
    - 8.80 ac.

- **Raritan River Greenway**
  - Raritan Borough (Raritan)
    - B 115 L 2
    - 0.44 ac.
**Open Space Preservation Highlights**

1) The County acquired parcels from 3 property owners totaling **51.19** acres. The total Open Space Inventory is now **14,750.43** acres. The total 2019 acreage includes a decrease of 2.09 acres as a result of an approved Green Acres land diversion and subdivision in Bridgewater Township for the Somerset Raritan Valley Sewerage Authority.

2) The **41.95** acre Katimbang property was the largest single acquisition in 2019. The acquisition makes a connection to a previously isolated open parcel and continues the expansion of the Sourland Mountain Preserve west to the County boundary. Preservation of contiguous wooded land within the Sourland region helps to protect critical habitat for local flora and fauna as well as migratory birds. The County is pursuing reimbursement for the acquisition through its ongoing Planning Incentive Grant with the NJDEP Green Acres Program. The property was acquired for $902,000 and the grant allows for a 50% reimbursement for acquisition and associated soft costs including demolition of the derelict residence on the property.

3) Following several years of negotiation, the County was able to preserve three parcels that make up the **8.8** acre Muckenhoupt property for **$320,000**. The acquisition of this property preserves over 1,200 linear feet of frontage of the South Branch of the Raritan River and continues the South Branch Greenway west connecting to previously preserved land at the County boundary. Two derelict residences and outbuildings will be demolished and the area will be allowed to revert to its natural state to continue to serve as a natural greenway/buffer and provide for storage of flood waters during storm events.

4) A **0.44** acre parcel of land along Orlando Drive was donated to Raritan Borough by Duke Farms for open space purposes. Seeing that the property was adjacent to other County owned open space and in a location where the County is pursuing preservation of the Raritan River Greenway, Raritan Borough donated the property to the County. The property will remain as open lawn for passive use within the greenway.

5) Heritage Strategies continues the development of the Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Master Plans. A single document will be prepared that coordinates all programs as well as three stand-alone documents. OSAC continues to receive periodic updates and will provide input on the recommendations of the Open Space Preservation Plan.
6) The County is currently under negotiations or under contract for approximately 300 acres totaling approximately $5,500,000.

7) The Somerset County Engineering Division Parks Section continues to assume administrative responsibilities for the Open Space Advisory Committee.

**Open Space Trust Fund**

During 2019, County open space acquisition costs totaled $1,222,000. In addition, a joint license agreement was executed between the County and Raritan Borough for approximately 40 acres of Borough-owned land along the Raritan River at Orlando Drive which includes the existing Raritan Borough Public Works building. The County paid $740,900 to the Borough for the right to maintain the properties as part of the Raritan River Greenway and to continue the development of the Raritan River Greenway Bikeway. The County will assist the Borough with the relocation of its Public Works facility.

Somerset County provided funding to Green Brook Township for preservation and development projects.
- Somerset County amended its February, 2016 Flood Mitigation Grant with the Township, increasing the grant by an additional $16,086.
- A $1,500,000 Recreation Grant was awarded to the Township for the development of Arthur Lewis Park.

Although the Open Space Trust Fund was not utilized for the acquisition, the Somerset County Improvement Authority acquired the Villa Maria property in North Plainfield for $4,700,000. A lease purchase agreement was executed between the Improvement Authority and the Borough and the property will be conveyed to North Plainfield for open space purposes.

As of December 31, 2019, a balance of $2,569,243 was available for acquisitions. This available amount includes the $1,000,000 Freeholder allocation from the Open Space Preservation Trust Fund for open space acquisitions.